



County Corner

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The Flathead County Commissioners

This will be the third in a series of columns highlighting the various offices and departments of Flathead County. We will be running a column in the Sunday edition of the Daily Interlake in the Perspectives Section every other week. The first two columns featured the Planning Department on July 30th and the Fairground Department on August 13th.

Our goal is to inform our citizens about the many services and programs the County provides and to help you get to know the leadership and staff who are part of our organization. We have 29 different departments and offices and so it will take a bit more than a year to provide some information on each one.

The County Commissioners hope this column will be beneficial and assist in providing our taxpayers with a better understanding of what County Government does for them. We appreciate the sponsors of the County Corner who allow us to provide this information at no cost to the taxpayers.

Our County Commissioners are Bob Watne, Gary Hall and Joe Brenneman. They serve six year terms, with Commissioner Watne completing his second term the end of this year. Their terms are staggered, so every two years one of the three positions is on the election ballot.

The Commissioners often hear the question, "What does a Commissioner do?" Flathead County is actually a good-sized business operation and employs approximately 500 people. The annual budget for the County was over \$58 million in FY 2006 and we are currently working on the FY 2007 budget at this time.

In essence, the three elected County Commissioners serve as the Chief Executive Officers (CEO's) for Flathead County. The Montana Code Annotated 7-4-2110 states "the Board of County Commissioners has jurisdiction and power...to (1)supervise the official conduct of



The County Commissioners meeting with the public on a land use issue.

all county officers...charged with assessing, collecting, safekeeping, managing, or disbursing public revenue, (2) see that officers faithfully perform their duties, (3) direct prosecutions for delinquencies, (4) when necessary, require the officers to renew their official bonds, make reports, and present their books and accounts for inspection, and (5) require the officers to supervise staff in a manner that complies with personnel policies and procedures adopted by the county governing body."

Probably the most significant power and duty of the Commissioners is to approve the county budget annually. We are nearing the end of the budgeting process. The Commissioners have met with each Elected Officer or Department Head and staff members to review and consider budget requests. It is the Commissioners duty to decide the amount of dollars to be levied to fund each office and department in the County.

The Commissioners typically meet four days a week to conduct official business. Their agendas call for a variety of decisions on matters within their jurisdiction, including personnel matters, contracts/agreements, subdivisions/land use, grants, road

closings, road naming, budget decisions, public hearings, management reports, meetings with municipal, state and federal officials, and a multitude of other business matters. There is a time set aside at each meeting for public comment from any citizen who would like to speak on any subject of concern.

In addition to attendance at their own official meetings, each Commissioner is assigned to serve on a variety of county boards, committees, and as liaisons to several organizations in the community. The Commissioners often are called upon to speak to a variety of groups and organizations in the county and to provide public press release information to the print, radio and television media representatives.

The Commissioners have a small office staff that includes the County Administrative Officer (Mike Pence), Office Manager (Elaine Nelson) and Office Assistant (Karen Green).

This just provides a brief overview of the duties and responsibilities of the three County Commissioners. These elected officials can be reached at their offices in the West Annex Building next to the Courthouse or by calling 758-5501.

"The needs of the future take precedent over the demands of the present."

— County Commissioners: Bob Watne, Gary Hall & Joe Brenneman